

Interview with Joseph Simonson

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

DR. JOSEPH SIMONSON

Interviewed by: Mr. Malcolm M. Mosing and Mrs. H.A. Musty

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Q: Dr. Simonson, you have had a varied career especially having been a Lutheran pastor and yet also politically active. Can you tell me something of how this has come to pass?

SIMONSON: Yes, it is true, Mal. I've had a rather varied kind of experience. I was born on a farm, for which I am grateful. I think that has helped me understand many things. I was born on a farm in Fillmore County near Lanesboro in 1904. Apparently, early, it became evident that I had a number of different interests because even in high school one of my classmates wrote after my name in a book I had, "Who preaches politics to poultry?" And oddly enough those three interests, preaching, politics and poultry have sort of run contemporary all through my life. I can remember one of the earliest political experiences, for example, giving a speech in English class in high school. We could take any subject we wanted to. It was in the Harding campaign of 1920 when he ran against former Governor Cox of Ohio. For my speech I had elected to do a speech in favor of Harding, my candidate for president, and I had gotten a very, very large campaign picture of Harding and I had a double breasted suit; so I had put this large picture underneath the double breasted suit and buttoned it there; the picture was kind of wrinkled by that time from use, but I secreted it there until at the proper moment in my speech, I unbuttoned my double breasted suit and there was this large picture of Harding! That English teacher,

Library of Congress

present at our recent 50th anniversary, said it took her 10 minutes to get the class back in order! Then when I came to college, again I was politically active there and was president of the Saint Olaf College Republican Club, which received a lot of publicity, so much that we were asked to organize clubs in other colleges in Minnesota.

As far as the ministry is concerned, that is something which began early, too. It was an early experience of mine, for example, in sixth grade I remember telling my father one time when we were cleaning the barn on the farm that I was going to be a Lutheran minister. And he said "Fine, Joe." And from that point on, all the way through high school and into my first years at Saint Olaf College, I was set for the ministry. Everyone knew that I was set for the seminary. But for some reason or other (during) the years at college, law came into preview. I was going to take some law school and ended with that idea in mind. In the meanwhile, I got the opportunity, which was certainly an excellent one, to do some law school work part-time when I was secretary to Congressman August Andresen. But on my way to Washington for the first time, it came to me that I didn't want to go into law and be a politician. I was going into the ministry, this is the second time, as it were, that the ministry call came to me. But during the first year that I was (with) Mr. Andresen, I was single yet and not been married, the call again faded out. I said, "No, I am going to keep on. I am going to take law and continue on with my law work here." The third time the call of the ministry came back again as a call from God. So when I did finally, then in my third year, serve with him I knew I was going to serve only that year. I was married then to Sylvia Rusley in Forest City, Iowa and we went back there one year knowing that it was going to be my last year, for several purposes; both because we thought, well this would give us a little more money to start the seminary because now I was not going to have a full time paid job and it would give my wife an opportunity to spend a year in Washington and she also received a job while she was there. So the last year we were in Washington together. Then, of course, there entered a new phase.

Library of Congress

Q: It was really right after college that you engaged (in) a period of full time political activity, wasn't it?

SIMONSON: Yes, that is true. During my senior year in college, there was going to be a Congressman elected in the third district in Minnesota, as it was called at that time. At least we thought there was going to be a new Congressman, the old Congressman was running, too, but everyone seemed to feel that he was going to be defeated. And then from Red Wing, August Andresen, who is Mrs. Musty's uncle, too, was running against the then incumbent. He was elected. So knowing the Chairman of his committee very well, who was on the faculty of St. Olaf College at that time, we approached him together on my becoming his secretary. And after a while that was arranged for and, therefore, long before I finished my college senior year, months before it, I knew I was going to be his secretary in the fall; however, I had the summer free. I served with Congressman Andresen for three years, Red Wing, of course, being his home and so we were in Red Wing during the time when Congress was not in session and Congress was not in session as long, in those years as they are now. In fact, every other year we had this so called Lame Duck session when we came home in March. And we were here from March through December. That didn't mean we weren't working because then we were near our constituents and they could come in to see us very easily, with their gripes and problems, easier than when we were in Washington. It was interesting work, of course, to me and helpful to me for all the years of the ministry later, even though it was known to me for that last year that I was going to finish up and go into Seminary. In fact, when I told August about it, that I was going into the Seminary, he did not try to persuade me from it but he was rather surprised and he said, "Joe, how are you going to manage it? Here you are married now and you have one child already, you are going to go three years now without a full time job, then you are not going to get very much money, after that. So, you have my blessings if that is what you want to do." I was surprised later on, and happily surprised, for example, at a little incident that happened at my first church I served, which was Moreland Lutheran Church in Chicago, leaving from the Seminary in 1931. At one time when they had had

Library of Congress

a new redistricting in Minnesota, and Congressman Andresen was going to enter a new district, which he had not had before. He was a little bit afraid of this one; it was involving a lot of new territory which he did not know, and so he wrote to me while I was pastor in Chicago, and asked me if, by any means, I could set aside a couple of weeks to come up and campaign with him by seeing our pastors, up here in southern Minnesota. And I asked our Board of Deacons in Chicago for permission to do this. I wanted to do it, but I certainly couldn't just go off without any permission. So I asked the Board of Deacons about it and the man that least of all I expected would have that kind of an attitude toward it because he was a kind of fundamentalist, pietistic sort of person, but he called for the floor and he said, "Mr. Chairman, I think we ought to let out pastor have two weeks leave of absence to go up to help Congressman Andresen if that will be of any help to him and he wants him. I think our pastor is a better pastor because he had those three years with Congressman Andresen before he came here than if he had gone straight through from college to the Seminary."

Q: You resigned then from being secretary to Congressman Andresen to enter the Seminary and prepare for the ministry.

SIMONSON: That is right. But even at the seminary I did some part time political work. I worked part time in the Governor's office doing speech researching for Governor Christiansen, at that time, and that came about in an unusual way, too. It was actually a House member from Faribault that was going to give me a job, part-time, knowing that I was married and had some needs financially since I was a seminary student. But it was arranged between he and the Governor that they would switch and I would go to the Governor's office in return for this man appointing someone that the Governor would like to have in the House, which he did. Governor Christiansen called me at the Seminary one time and I almost goofed because he said, "This is Governor Christiansen." It is a good thing I didn't answer humorously, but just accepted it that way instead of replying as though someone was pulling my leg! He told me about the deal that he had in mind, but he said Steandemo, who was the representative concerned, would not agree to

Library of Congress

it unless it was agreeable to me. "Well," I said, "What would I be doing?" he told me, "Speech research really and maybe some other things but as you know I have to give many speeches and I like to have something that is germane to the issue and I would like to have some history, for example, of the place I am going to, and things of that kind. That is what I would like to have you do and I can keep you here longer than the session of the House. I probably can not pay you as much per month as you would get over there. But I assume that you would like to have work all the time so I can keep you here longer than they can keep you over in the House. And if it should happen that my budget should run out for this job, I will see to it that you get another part time job in the capital," which was, of course, very promising for me and so it did turn out that his budget did run out and then he himself personally, Governor Christiansen, got me a job in the State Banking Commissioner's Office. Then from the Banking Commissioner's Office, when that ran out, and his budget for this particular part time work ran out, I served out the rest of my time during the seminary years, in the State Auditor's Office under Ray P. Chase. So even there at the Seminary I wasn't completely avoiding my political interests.

Q: What was your first parish after graduation from the Seminary in 1931?

SIMONSON: I went to Moreland Lutheran Church in Chicago in 1931. It was, I suppose the most barren period politically in my whole life. Chicago was big. You didn't just walk in, you didn't know the situation, I didn't know the people like I knew them in Minnesota. It was a different type of political operation as you might well know. It was the day of the Nash-Kelly machine and I learned to know Mr. Nash and Mr. Kelly as far as that is concerned, particularly through our ward alderman Roger Kiley, who was Notre Dame All-American end in his time at Notre Dame. And we had one time when we needed the Mayor's help. One of the things I did while I was pastor there in the 9 years in Chicago was to serve as the director of the Lutheran Mid-Day Services in Lent downtown at one of the theaters, the Erlanger theater right downtown. There we had services at noon and so the last time I had a negotiation with the manager he said, "Now, I don't know if they would bother you or not, but I want to tell you that we have a contract with the Musician's Union of Chicago.

Library of Congress

Since you are going to have hymns and use piano accompaniment, they may want to force you to use them; they may not, but I am just telling you about it." Well, the first day we had the service on Ash Wednesday and nothing was said but in the afternoon I received a call from a man who said, "I am a Musician's Union Agent. Now you are one who has something to do with the Lutheran services. We have a contract there you know and, therefore, we have to provide the piano accompaniment for your service down there and I understand that you didn't use any Musician's Union pianist today." I said, "No, we don't really have any intention of doing that because it is only a twenty minute service in the first place and nobody is getting paid for it, there is no price of admission and we have all kinds of volunteers who can play for the two hymns, which is all that is involved in the music." He said, "Nevertheless, we have a contract and we have to keep it, so you had better arrange to have the musicians of our union. We don't care if you use them or not, that is all right but they can stand by. You can use your people; we don't care about that, but you will have to have our musicians union standing by and paid. So you had better take care of that." I let it go at that for about three or four days more and we heard nothing, but on the last day of the next week I had a call from the same man again. "I thought I made myself clear to you the other day. But I understand that you still have not employed a musician from the union." I said, "No, we really aren't going to." He said, "You'd better or else." So I thought we had better protect ourselves a little bit. I knew that Mayor Kelly was a good friend of Petrillo of the Musician's Union. So I got hold of Mayor Kelly through our Alderman Kiley and told him of the situation. I said, "Do you think we ought to get hold of Mayor Kelly and see if he can do something?" He said, "I think we better." I asked the Alderman to set up an appointment with Mayor Kelly. So we went down to see Mayor Kelly. Imagine going to see the Mayor of the city the size of Chicago to get something like this done! The mayor immediately called up Mr. Petrillo on the phone and started talking to him about it and apparently he wasn't getting anywhere with the fellow, Jim Petrillo. The mayor was getting redder and redder around the collar and getting louder and louder as he was talking to Petrillo and finally he had had enough of this apparently because he said,

Library of Congress

“Jim, you have got to do it.” He slammed down the phone and we never heard another word from the Musicians Union.

Q: How long were you a pastor in Chicago and where did you go from there?

SIMONSON: Nine years in Chicago and they were Depression years. Sometimes I felt more like a referee of bankruptcy than a pastor, because the congregation had just built a building before we came there, beautiful church, beautiful manse we lived in, but they had overbuilt, like many people had in those days and there was a huge debt for a comparatively small number of families. But we did manage, of course, and we had a very interesting and fruitful nine years in Chicago, which we enjoyed in many other ways. Then we went from there to Saint Paul and here, of course, we were back in old familiar territory. My longest time as pastor was in Christ Lutheran Church on Capitol Hill right across the street from the state capitol and they were interesting years for many reasons. Again I was able to get into the political scene since I knew so many of the people up here and for the twelve years that I served there I was chaplain in the Minnesota State Senate. In fact, one year I was half of the time chaplain in the House of Representatives and the other half in the State Senate, the only one who had served in both houses in the same session, but for twelve years in the Senate itself. Of course, there were other things, too. I was, for example, chairman of the State Pastors Council during some of the time that I was there and the Saint Paul Pastors Association and we stayed there long enough to feel the impact of the city and of the people and we still love to go back to the Christ Lutheran Church, though today it is a lot different than, of course, it was in our time. I almost think it was in its hey day period, but being a downtown church it had suffered decrease of membership and yet we are amazed they do as well as they do even yet. Just this last week, for example, on Tuesday we were there for a reunion and it is amazing the number of people that have stuck to it, as it were, even though they may have moved some distance away. But it is a strategic church, it is well located, it is a beautiful church, located right across from Leif Erickson Park, which was put up and dedicated by

Library of Congress

Leif Erickson Park commissioners while we were there. The statue of Leif Erickson, the discoverer of America!

Q: In your Minnesota political associations after returning from Chicago, were there any officials with whom you were especially intimate?

SIMONSON: Well, Congressman Andresen was still living and still active in Congress and we visited a couple of times in Washington D.C. We kept up correspondence. It was the time Stassen finished being governor; it was during the period that he resigned to go into the navy. One of the last public appearances he made was his speech at our church. The church was just jammed to hear him because it was known that he was here to make one of his last public appearances before entering the navy. Then, of course, Edward Thye became the governor. He was the Lieutenant Governor during Stassen's last term. He worshiped God in our church, incidentally being a member of St. John's Lutheran Church in Northfield. But whenever he stayed over the weekends in St. Paul, he and his daughter, who was still unmarried at the time, would come and be communicants in our own church, Christ Lutheran Church, and attend services there. He was Governor at that point. Later as Senator we kept up our relationship, too. Then it was also the period of C. Elmer Anderson and Luther Youngdahl with whom we had very pleasant and rather intimate relationships, being chaplain of the Senate of course, made it possible to be even more so than just as pastor of the church.

Q: I suppose that the real central point in top experience in your political life was being United States Ambassador to Ethiopia. Could you tell me something of how this appointment came your way?

SIMONSON: It certainly is true that that is the high point, Mal. Many people wonder how a Lutheran pastor became the United States Ambassador, because this is not usual, this is true. On the other hand, one of my friends said that he thought that this was not at all uncalled for because he said why should we be unqualified for the service of the

Library of Congress

diplomatic corps once in a while because we are clergy. We are part of the citizenship, too and I think it is perfectly right that once in a while a pastor does serve as a United States Ambassador and with my political interests at any rate, no one was too surprised at it, I suppose, though it is a choice appointment, naturally and one that is sought tremendously. There are not too many ambassadors, even though there have been a great many new nations carved out of the continent of Africa these last years. Yet, there are not too many ambassadors and therefore for a pastor to be appointed United States Ambassador was not entirely an expected event. There were two people, I suppose, we should single out, particularly, who were responsible and helpful. You see being the top republican office-holder in Minnesota in a Republican national administration, Senator Thye was in a key position, as far as patronage positions were concerned and appointments politically in Minnesota. Senator Thye and Congressman Andresen were still in Congress and active politically. Those two were really my chief supports and the chief instigators, Senator Thye and Congressman Andresen. As a matter of fact, we were planning on this appointment four years earlier than it came because you may remember four years before this particular election, everybody expected Mr. Dewey to be elected President. And the election year that year, Senator Thye, Congressman Andresen and I were together on that election day and we were all talking about who was going to do what the next day, because of course, Tom was going to be elected President! So Congressman Andresen was going to get a hold of this one and he said if I don't get a hold of this one then I will do something else. Well, the next morning none of us had anything to do but we waited for four years and the opportunity came and we were really ready for it. We had four years of practice!

I was then with the National Lutheran Council and, thinking back upon it now, I suppose it would have been more difficult if not even impossible to receive the appointment had I been yet still a parish pastor. It would have been difficult for them to justify it, for the President and the Secretary of State of justify it. But I occupied one unique position, then , among the pastors of the country. I was public relations director of the National

Library of Congress

Council, I was the only one. So they could logically do this without any jealousies, without any conflicts in other people thinking that they should have had the appointment rather than myself. Although, I lived in New York, at the time, and lived and worked there, the appointment was a Minnesota appointment because I had really not relinquished that in a sense. Although I had voted, of course, in New York for General Eisenhower for Presidential candidate that year. When the announcement first came in the newspaper of the rumors, the rumors printed in the paper a long time before it happened, Senator Thye said he got a very irate call from a Senator from New York one time saying, How in the world somebody from New York got appointment of the United States Ambassador to Ethiopia, he didn't even know the man. So Senator Thye said, "Settle down, don't get worried. You are not going to be charged with the appointment in New York. It is going to be a Minnesota appointment so don't get worried about it at all. You are not going to lose an appointment." They were afraid, you see, that they were losing a New York appointment to an outsider, as it were. Which was not true at all. Even though we actually did live in New York, it was a Minnesota appointment. My commission reads, Joseph Simonson of Minnesota, for example. Others than Senator Thye and Congressman Andresen who were important, too, in the appointment and seeing to it being brought about was Gabriel Hauge, who at the time had become the economic advisor to President Eisenhower, even a speech writer for him before. He was a friend of mine for some years before, a graduate of Concordia Lutheran College at Moorhead, Minnesota. Then Senator Wiley of Wisconsin who was then chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and I had gotten to know him somewhat before, recommended me. The President of our church, President Aasgaard, was very instrumental and even more interested than I thought he would ever become, he was urgent about this appointment coming my way. Walter Judd was interested and in on it, also. Of course, John Foster Dulles, as Secretary of State, made the official recommendation to the President. That is sort of the chronology of the events, shall we say.

Library of Congress

Q: I am curious that the appointment came specifically to Ethiopia rather than some other country?

SIMONSON: There are two things that I think I can say about that. In the first place, years before that I had read in Reader's Digest a sort of travel story about Ethiopia. it was really my introduction to Ethiopia. I really didn't know much about it before and a lot of people don't even know much about Ethiopia yet today. Certainly in those days, very few people knew even more than the fact that it had been invaded by the Italians and occupied for a while. But I read this article on Ethiopia and it was sort of a tourist type of thing saying among the things I remember that you can get a marvelous meal, marvelous steak dinners in Ethiopia in those days for 65 cents. Then it talked about it being so exotic and that if you really wanted to go to a place that was different you should go to Ethiopia, the one place left that was primitive and which had a lot of interesting antiquities in history which people didn't know about. So, this sort of stuff stuck in the back of my mind. Ethiopia had always been in the back of my head. If I ever had to travel anywhere I have to go to Ethiopia! Then, when John Foster Dulles called me in Chicago and I happened to be in a meeting in Chicago at the time and he called me there and he said, "We have decided to appoint you an ambassador. Where would you be willing to go?" I said, "I had thought about it too, and I will give you four places, Mr. Dulles; I will accept appointment to Norway, Denmark, Union of South Africa or Ethiopia." He said, "Well, that is fine. I am glad to know that those are the four and we will be in touch with you later on but we have made up our minds that you will be appointed ambassador. I don't see any reason why it couldn't be one of those our places you mentioned." So later on, Senator Thye called, but it was Dulles who called to ask me about my selections. But later on, in another meeting in Chicago, Senator Thye called and he said, "Well you are being appointed Ambassador to Ethiopia. Will you accept?" I said, "Well, of course." So I called Sylvia in New York and told her we were going to Ethiopia. I immediately hurried from my meeting over to the Chicago Library and got some books on Ethiopia and started reading up on the country and people but not as

Library of Congress

much as I had wanted to do, of course, and so we went to Ethiopia for those two reasons, shall we say, in a way.

Q: On the next phase, did you enjoy your service in Ethiopia?

SIMONSON: Well, we certainly did enjoy our service in Ethiopia. It was an experience that we will never forget those four years of the first term of President Eisenhower. They were four delightful years. There were so many things that were delightful about it that it is hard to say and single them out. For one thing, however, and that is something that most people so not realize is the climate in Ethiopia, especially up on the plateau where we lived. It is delightful and most people who know how much we hate warm weather, both Mrs. Simonson and myself, and someone said how in the world are you going to take it. I said you don't know how much fun it is going to be and so delightful. You see, if you look at the map of Ethiopia and you see it is right near the equator and so you immediately think it is warm and most people anyway popularly think of Ethiopia and all Africa as being steaming jungle or the Sahara Desert. Well, as a matter of fact, Ethiopia in the upper plateau region, 8,000 feet up of better where I was located, it is high enough you see, to moderate the heat, which in near the equator, but it is near enough to the equator so that it never gets too cold. So we had between 50-70 degrees roughly the whole year through. We never expect to live in a better climate than Ethiopia, for example. And then the country is exotic, as I called attention to before. It is so totally different in so many, many ways. Its people are wonderful people, they are courteous, poised in spite of, we might say, illiteracy as far as the technical. Illiteracy is concerned with reading and writing, but they are people of very considerable dignity. We enjoyed, of course, the relationship with them and we did get to know a great many of them. We enjoyed the relationships with the church, for example, and having been a pastor, this was of especial interest to me. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which is in the ancient Coptic stream historically, does not want to be called Coptic, in a sense, because Coptic means Egyptian and the were not Egyptian in that sense, you see, but they did have relationships with the Egyptian Coptic Church and the Armenian Church and the Syrian Church of India. Those

Library of Congress

four were closer to each other than any others although from the very beginning, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been a member of the World Council of Churches from its constituting convention in Amsterdam and has continued that membership. When we first came, however, they were a little bit suspicious of us and as a matter of fact, the foreign minister, when he was here in the United States negotiating the military aid agreement which we had with the country of Ethiopia, John Foster Dulles told me this the last briefing I had with him before we left for Ethiopia for the first time that at one time Akilu, the foreign minister then, had asked Mr. Dulles, what was the United States sending to Ethiopia. Are they sending an ambassador or are they sending a missionary? Because the Ethiopia Orthodox Church is a state church; it is a little bit jealous of its position and of its status there and they were a little afraid maybe we were undermining that and that I was coming as ambassador, all right enough, but under the guise of also trying to subvert, shall we say, almost, the Ethiopian Church. So when we first came, they were suspicious, actually, and when we attended their services they wondered if we came just to sort of spy. But it didn't take very long before we established a sincere relationship and some of the finest associations we had were with the top ranking Ethiopian clergy. It's an old church, of course, from the third century and it is an interesting church, it's an historic church, it does many things differently than we do, that's true enough, and yet we always did enjoy going to their services as we enjoyed having intimate visits with some of their bishops and other clergy, the archbishop, for example. This was rather an interesting thing, nobody expected this, I suppose, it must not have been expected because one of the protocol people whom I was supposed to call on immediately, was the archbishop of the church, Archbishop Basileos. The weekly paper recorded my visit and it said the Ambassador to Ethiopia from the United States of America and His Eminence, the Archbishop Basileos, engaged a congenial conversation for 46 minutes! Apparently, we were not expected to have a congenial conversation because we were supposed to be suspect but we were very friendly toward the end and they enjoyed our relationship and the help that we were able to give to them and the mediation which, in a sense, we were able to relate between our own missionaries who were there. They do have missionary societies in Ethiopia

Library of Congress

particularly among the Muslims because many people were Muslims, not all belonged to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church even though it is the state church. It has its great history, though, and many festivities and holidays that were interesting to us. We could go on and on about the Ethiopian Church. One rather humorous incident: one of the Congressional Committees that was there on a Sunday and one of the members asked if he could be taken to one of the Ethiopian Churches. He said he would like to go to a typical Ethiopian Church while he was here. Would you be willing to take me? I said, "Certainly, I will take you to the Emperor's personal church," in that sense, although he had a chapel on his own grounds but this is the church in which he will be buried, for example. His crypt is really there now and his wife, who had died, is buried there now and his other children who have died, who preceded him in death, are buried there in the crypt of his church. In his church, which is a very large church, a beautiful church. It has a mural, for example, of the Emperor giving his speech to the League of Nations, the great famed speech when he said, "God and history will judge what you do here today." And then riding in on his white horse after the occupation was over and the English had driven out the Italians and there was some other governmental picture, too and one of the congressmen mentioned this to me and he said that it was clear there was no separation of church and state here!

Q: We would like to know something about the life and the economy of the people of Ethiopia?

SIMONSON: Well, the people of Ethiopia for one thing, and that is another thing that we have to disabuse many Americans of. They are not Negro, for example, except for one tribe. They are Semitic in background as far as their racial stock is concerned. Their life, therefore, is governed in a great many ways by that fact.

They are an agricultural economy, most of the people having their living from farming. It is not large scale farming, shall we say, in most cases share cropping. Many nobles own a great deal of land and they have farmers on it who grow many things that we grow here, except corn, for example, in some of the regions can not be grown. Then they have some

Library of Congress

things different that we don't grow here like teff which is the ingredient for the bread they use. They grow other things like we do, grains and cereals and feed themselves, clothe themselves. The climate being what it is the shelter does not have to be very adequate, you see, it is nice enough for that. Coffee and hides are the chief exports. It is estimated that there are 25,000,000 people in Ethiopia, although there has never been a census conducted so it can not be certain, of course. Its government is monarchical, His Imperial Majesty is supreme ruler, no doubt about it, but a very benevolent monarch, one of the finest men that we have ever had to deal with, intelligent, knowledgeable about all the things in the world. There are many tribes, and these tribes have different languages and therefore it is an empire and that is why he is called an Emperor. Now that isn't just a fanciful title for him but it really is an empire because it consists of a confederation of tribes which were brought together by Menelik II who immediately preceded Haile Selassie I as the last great Emperor before the present Emperor, who has incidentally reigned for a great many years. It is an ancient land, it is rugged, mountainous terrain in the horn of East Africa. Amharic is the official language. It is the source of the Blue Nile, incidentally, a lot of people do not realize. The Nile, the White Nile and the Blue Nile meet at Khartoum and the Blue Nile carries most of the water of the Nile, and that originates in Ethiopia. Eighty percent of the water of the Nile at Cairo comes from Ethiopia, the White Nile supplying the rest of it. The Axum Obelisks and the Lalibela Churches are the two great antiquities of Ethiopia, for example, which people ought to visit when they come there. The Axum Obelisks precede the time of Christ, too, and the Lalibela Churches are from about the 13th century.

The people live almost zestfully in this sense that they are happy. We may look upon their living standards as very low compared to ours, but on the other hand, there is no malnutrition. They are not undernourished and while their status is low, compared to ours, for them it is rather satisfying.

Library of Congress

Q: Here are two points: 1. There seems to be a misunderstanding and 2. Even more than that, I suppose a lack of understanding about the work of an ambassador. Could you tell me what an ambassador does in a foreign country?

SIMONSON: Yes, you are right in saying that there is a lot of misunderstanding, from some people thinking that this is an unnecessary ornament, and just a decoration, to those who have a feeling that it really is important. Now diplomacy has become more and more important, it seems to me and like Senator Thye once said, probably diplomacy is the last and most effective line of defense we will have, after all. I usually define the work of an ambassador into four categories of essential work. This would be true in practically every country, though in a developing country like Ethiopia it is a little bit more true in one case, one part of it than in another, for example. It is one reason why it proved to us to be helpful in Ethiopia and I am glad it was Ethiopia than some of the others. Had I been in Norway or Denmark, for example, it would have been very interesting and fascinating, speaking Norwegian as I do, and knowing the history and background, but it would not have been nearly as interesting and certainly not as exotic nor as helpful and we would have found ourselves, I think with more time on our hands than we would have liked to have. But in Ethiopia there is a developing country and a chance to aid. Well, anyway, the four categories are this, first what we might call intelligence, knowing, in other words, what this country is doing, thinking, and passing this information on to our state department, to our president, to Congress; that, of course, is the original purpose, naturally of diplomacy. Then a second is what we might call propaganda. We are interested in putting our best foot forward and we do this through our embassies. There is no sense in putting your worst foot forward, if you have two feet you might as well put your best foot forward. So we do that, that in our second category. Then we have a tremendous amount of business, shall we say, to do. These are between the government of that particular country and our government; I am not talking about the investments coming in and having industry there, I am talking about the business we have with the government itself, in aid agreements, for example, in Ethiopia. But also a great deal of work is done in the United Nations and

Library of Congress

therefore you have an opportunity there as our two people who represent Ethiopia and us in the United Nations confer back and forth and secure agreements on how you are going to stand on issues in the United Nations. And, incidentally, I want to pay Ethiopia this compliment; that Ethiopia has supported the United States in the United Nations on more issues than any other nation in the history of the United Nations.

Q: What was the nature and size of the staff with which you worked in the embassy in Ethiopia?

SIMONSON: In the chancery, which is the official name of the office of an embassy, there were 24 Americans and 42 locals; now that is right in the chancery itself. In addition to that, of course, we had a military attach#, who was resident there in Ethiopia with another staff. Then we had our point four program as it was called at that time; it had been known by other names, AID now, in which we serve in agricultural development, water conservation, public health and education. Now when I say 24 Americans there, of course, I am talking particularly about the Deputy Chief of Mission, for example, who is a political officer, you might say the economic officer, the consul, and the third secretary. Then we have our CIA, Central Intelligence Agency, the Administration office and the General Services office. In the residence we had our driver, house servants and the gardeners. Now in addition to the Army Attach# resident there, we also accredit to Ethiopia, you see and Air Attach# and a Navy Attach# who were resident in Cairo, but who nevertheless had responsibility for Ethiopia and came there twice a year in their planes. Then we had part of the Signal Corps operation of the U.S. Army at Asmara, about a 2 hour airplane trip away from us. There were roughly between 1,500 and 2,000 members present in Asmara. At the time we were in Ethiopia, there were about 3,000 Americans of all kinds there; now there are more than that by quite a ways.

Q: What aid were we giving Ethiopia when you were the ambassador there?

Library of Congress

SIMONSON: Some military aid, very minor really when we compare it with other nations, but we were supplying some military aid, both hardware and assistance in the actual instruction. Then our other aid was mainly agricultural because our conviction is, of course, that Ethiopia is an agricultural country, it is never going to be a heavy industrial country, but it can become a great breadbasket of the Middle East, really. So we were interested in the improvement of their crops, other methods, other livestock and other schools of agriculture and we developed two schools of agriculture during the period that I served as ambassador.

We were interested in improving their education facilities. They are fantastically interested in education and even yet they do not have the opportunity for all of the people who would like to go to school to go to school because they do not have the facilities and the teachers. Then we are interested in their public health, both preventative and otherwise. So there was a great deal of translating of public health printed material and much other aid in public health methods and facilities and personnel. Water conservation is a very important element in Ethiopia. There is a rainy season and a dry season and during the dry season there is a great need for water. If the water in the rainy season can be conserved then it would be great help but that is one of the problems, to conserve, sufficiently the water in the rainy season when it rained very, very heavily, but it would always run off unless reservoirs and dams and other methods were made to keep it. In other words, you might say in general that we were there to help them help themselves.

Q: You must have had some experiences that stand out above others. Would you tell us about some of the memorable events and incidents that occurred in those 4 years in Ethiopia?

SIMONSON: Well, His Imperial Majesty's trip to the United States in 1954 was probably the most memorable experience that I had during the 4 years. When one is provided the opportunity to very quickly and very intimately become acquainted with the Emperor, more probably than some other ambassadors, so much so that at a reception one time I as

Library of Congress

relating to one of the other ambassadors, having been down to see the Foreign Minister about the trip that day and the other day I had been down to see His Imperial Majesty himself about the trip and everything, he said what are you doing, sleeping down at the palace these days? It almost amounted to that because to arrange for his trip, no one realizes the fantastic detail that has to be gone into for a head of state's official visit to another country, such as this one was. It was so interesting to have him here, of course, and we could relate so many incidents about that, too, but we will forgo it. It was such an interesting trip which he enjoyed. It was his first time here in 1954. He wanted to come here before but he had not received an official invitation and a head of state has to have an official invitation from the head of state of that country in order to come to that country. Then the second thing was the 25th anniversary of his coronation in 1955; that again was a memorable experience, he had served as a regent before, but it was 25 years as an Emperor. He is 77 years old now and for all practical purposes has ruled Ethiopia for 50 years, which is a pretty durable sort of a reign, I don't think there are many others who can claim it and therefore you will notice now, for example, in the De Gaulle funeral and in other cases like that where heads of states from around the world are gathered, it is always number 1, Emperor Haile Selassie. He is number 1 always, because he is the longest reigning head of state in the world. Then of course, we had foreign visitors there, our own VIP's, Marshal Tito, General De Gaulle, he was not president of France at that time, he was out of power, but nevertheless he was an interesting person to have, Bernard of the Netherlands, and Earl and Lady Mountbatten, and then our own Vice President at that time, President Nixon now. There was an international trade fair during the coronation anniversary, which was interesting, too. You want to remember, also, that it was a memorable thing that you yourself, Mal, visited with our daughter and her husband, your brother, so we don't want to forget that those 10 days which you spent there were memorable for us and I hope for you, too.

Q: It was certainly the most memorable 10 days I spent ever. I was just thinking here that we have not mentioned one thing that came up early in the interview. We have talked a

Library of Congress

good deal about preaching and politics but we have sort of forgotten about the poultry. Now where, when and in what ways has this been a part of your life?

SIMONSON: Yes, poultry hasn't been as large a part, I suppose, as preaching and politics but as a boy I suppose it was. I was born and raised on a farm as we have indicated before and there the poultry was my particular assignment; that is no one else bothered about that, that was my area. I fed, I kept accounts, I sold, I did everything with reference to poultry on the farm, that was my domain. I did do some unusual things with it, I remember I went into the fancy end of it, I wouldn't say I was raising some ordinary chickens, you see. I remember buying a hen one time from Vineyard's Hole, Mass. that came almost famished when she came, but we revived her. I paid \$25 for the hen, but this was really warranted when the next year I was able to sell hatching eggs from this hen for \$1 a piece and then later on as I went into show business with some of these chickens. I sold a rooster one time, and that was in a little town of Lanesboro where that Fillmore County Poultry Show was being held, for \$50. So my farming at that time was not without some profit and then, of course in Ethiopia we did have some chickens there for a period of time because of the eggs being small there and bitter and unreliable and so we got our own day old chicks from Nairobi and raised them. Since that we haven't done too much with poultry, we may get back into it again, you can't tell some time because I still like chickens very, very much.

Q: (portion missing) around saying ung-ga-wa ung-ga-wa before they ate the white men. Now you really saw Africa as a fabulous and varied continent and I am wondering what did you see outside the country of Ethiopia, itself, of Africa and what about within the borders of the country?

Q: You finished your diplomatic tour of duty in 1957. What have you done since that and what are you doing now?

Library of Congress

SIMONSON: I happen to be serving as what is called the Senior Advisor of Concerts and Lectures in the University of Minnesota Program Service, which is a position that I have held in the last four years, as it were sliding from retirement from the ministry, which I closed off from my last church, Immanuel Lutheran Church in Eden Prairie, a suburb of Minneapolis. The work with the University involves calling on schools throughout the state of Minnesota and northern Iowa and eastern South Dakota offering then the services of assemblies programs which the University has had for 56 years, so it is an old, old service at the University. I went, however, before that, when we came back from Ethiopia to a pastorate in Concordia Lutheran Church in Superior Wisconsin, where we served first. That was my first parish back again from Ethiopia and then from there to the Eden Prairie Church, as I said, where we started a new church. It was a mission church, there was nothing there at all. One day it was a wheat field and the next day they were digging the hole for the church. So we had that experience which I had been offered many times before and I had been turning them down. I think I must have had 5 or 6 different calls to start mission churches and finally said to myself these are coming so frequently and so much that it must be that God wants me to have this experience once before I leave the ministry, so maybe this one I had better take. They offered three different ones at the time, all of them in the Minneapolis area, and they said these three we are going to open now. We would like you to go down and take a look at them and whichever one you would like to take, if you want to take one, we will call you to that particular one. Well, Mrs. Simonson and I did visit the three places and selected, then, Eden Prairie, which is still even fairly rural but growing and just a couple of weeks ago there was a story in the Sunday MINNEAPOLIS STAR about the growth that is expected in Eden Prairie within the next five years or so. That was our last church and I am now with the University of Minnesota in the University of Minnesota Program Service calling on schools of all kinds. Even some of our Junior Colleges use our programs and elementary schools, high schools, schools of Nursing, business colleges, throughout all of Minnesota, northern Iowa, eastern South Dakota with a total of about 1,300 schools that we serve.

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Q: Thank you, Dr. Simonson, for this very interesting preaching, politics and poultry that you have given us this afternoon.

SIMONSON: Thank you for the opportunity.

End of interview